

As an organization concerned about health care, do you know which health crisis is described by the following?

- It impacts nearly one in every three people living in the United States.
- Everyone in the United States is susceptible regardless of age, race, education or income.
- It costs the health system as much as \$58 billion a year.



Answer: Low health literacy

Surprised?

Many people are. But health literacy – the ability to read, understand and act on health information – is now known to be vital to good patient care and positive health outcomes. Understanding the scope and impact of health literacy is also vital to how your organization communicates critical health information to patients and providers.

A Hidden Health Crisis

A Serious Impact

As an emerging public health issue, low health literacy is often misunderstood as a condition that affects a specific portion of the population. In reality, its scope is broad and its impact severe.

Although low health literacy can affect everyone regardless of background or educational level, studies on the issue show that limited literacy skills are a stronger predictor of an individual's health status than age, income, employment status, education level, and racial or ethnic group. Although ethnic minority groups are disproportionately affected by low literacy, the majority of those with low literacy skills in the United States are white, native-born Americans.

- Others who are especially vulnerable in a health care situation include:
 - Older adults
 - Recent immigrants (who may be highly literate in their native language)
 - People with a chronic disease
 - Those with low socioeconomic status

The impact of low health literacy on health outcomes is significant. For example:

- Only 50 percent of all patients take medications as directed, leading to compliance issues and possible negative health outcomes.
- Adults with low health literacy average 6 percent more hospital visits – and remain in the hospital nearly two days longer – than adults with higher health literacy.
- Annual health care costs for those with low literacy skills are four times higher than for those with higher literacy skills.





There Are Solutions

In response to this public health issue, a coalition of national organizations has been formed to raise awareness and develop solutions to improve clear health communication between patients and providers. The **Partnership for Clear Health Communication** has developed an action agenda and is actively developing tools to enable providers of information and providers of care to address the problem of low health literacy and improve health outcomes – one patient at a time.

The four-pronged action agenda of the Partnership is:

- Expand awareness and educate patients and providers about low health literacy.
- Develop and apply practical solutions to improve patient/provider communication and motivate the health care system to adopt them.
- Conduct an active advocacy program to increase support for health literacy policy and funding.
- Conduct nationally coordinated research to define the health literacy issue and evaluate solutions.

Good Questions for Patients' Good Health

Because clear communication is the foundation for patients to be able to understand and act on health information, the Partnership has launched its first solution-based initiative from its action agenda, titled **Ask Me 3**. Asking 3 is a quick, effective tool designed to improve health communication between patients and providers.

Through patient and provider education materials developed by leading health literacy experts (available via www.AskMe3.org),

Ask Me 3 promotes three simple but essential questions that patients should ask their providers in every health care interaction and that providers should always encourage their patients to understand the answers to:

1. **What is my main problem?**
2. **What do I need to do?**
3. **Why is it important for me to do this?**

How Can My Organization Participate?

The movement to enhanced health outcomes through improved health literacy is gaining momentum. A growing number of prominent organizations are using Partnership-developed materials to educate and motivate their provider and patient memberships with the goal of increasing positive health outcomes for all patients.

Organizations nationwide are doing a variety of things – most of them taking very little time – to support the goals of the Partnership and help improve our nation's health literacy dramatically and immediately. Your organization can participate in these activities as well, starting today.

Educate Yourself and Your Staff

- Broaden your knowledge of the low health literacy issue and associated concerns so that you can help your constituents, patients and providers. The following items are available at www.AskMe3.org:
 - **Ask Me 3** materials for patients and providers
 - Examples of simple interventions
 - A list of literacy resources
 - A white paper detailing the scope and impact of low health literacy – and solutions that address the issue
 - A bibliography of research studies
- Request that your organization's human resources department include this brochure among member-orientation materials.
- Request that department heads review this brochure at your next staff meeting.
- Include an article on the scope and impact of health literacy – and solutions such as **Ask Me 3** – in your newsletter or on your Web site.
- Display **Ask Me 3** posters in your offices to encourage staff members to spread the word.



Educate Public Officials

- Support funding for health literacy research and local literacy/English as a Second Language (ESL) programs.
- Share **Ask Me 3** and other health literacy materials, as well as your concern about health literacy, with:

- Your state legislators
- Your congressional representatives and senators
- Advocacy groups in which you participate

If your organization would like to join the **Partnership for Clear Health Communication** or learn when new tools are available, visit us at www.AskMe3.org or call 1-877-4-ASK-ME-3.



**Together,
we can make
a difference!**

Educate Your Constituents

- Conduct local outreach to promote clear health communication at hospitals and community centers.
- Distribute **Ask Me 3** materials and other health literacy information to your constituents.
- Dedicate a section or panel to health literacy at your next convention or meeting. Helpful resources to increase the impact of this outreach are available at www.AskMe3.org.
- Distribute **Ask Me 3** patient and provider brochures at health fairs and events.

Patients Should Be Encouraged to Understand the Answers to Three Questions:

1

**What is my
main problem?**

2

**What do I
need to do?**

3

**Why is it important
for me to do this?**

The **Partnership for Clear Health Communication** is a coalition of national organizations that are working together to promote awareness and solutions around the issue of low health literacy and its effect on health outcomes. The Partnership serves consumers, public health officials, health care professionals, health educators, literacy specialists, patient advocates and caregivers, health associations and policymakers.

The Partnership and its individual members are committed to offering free and low-cost resources and programs that deliver patient information, medical education and practice management tools to care and information providers.

Partnership Steering Committee Members:

American Federation for Aging Research
American Medical Association Foundation
American Nurses Association
American Pharmacists Association
American Public Health Association
David Baker, MD
California Literacy, Inc.
National Alliance for Caregiving
National Alliance for Hispanic Health
National Association of Community
Health Centers
National Coalition for Literacy
National Council of La Raza,
Institute for Hispanic Health
The National Council on the Aging
National Health Council
National Medical Association
Janet Ohene-Frempong, MS
Partnership for Prevention
Pfizer Inc
ProLiteracy Worldwide

Additional materials are available at www.AskMe3.org



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